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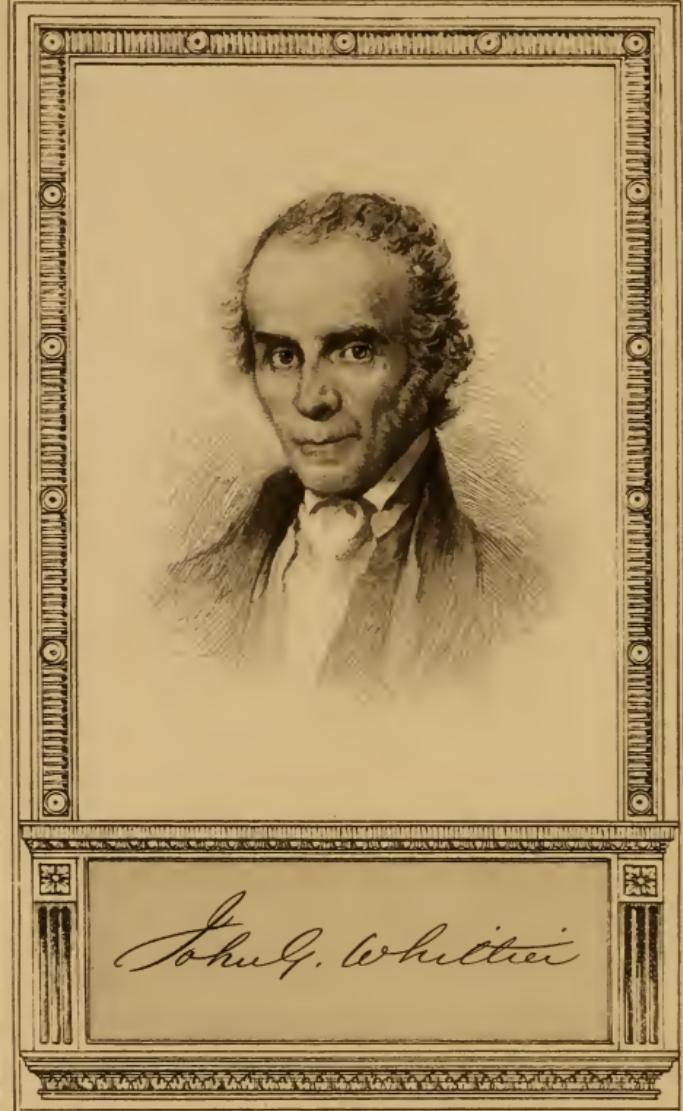
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JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

BY

RICHARD BURTON



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JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

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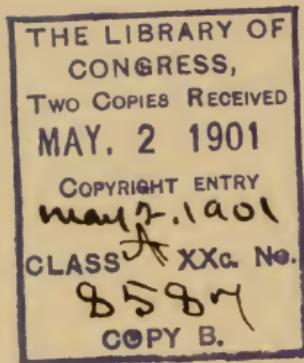
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The frontispiece is after a crayon portrait by Charles A. Barry, of which a large photograph, now rare, was published in 1859. In this volume, and in “Whittier as a Politician” (Boston, 1901: Charles E. Goodspeed), the picture is now first reproduced in smaller form. The present engraving is by John Andrew & Son, Boston.

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TO MY MOTHER

PREFACE.

It has been the aim in writing this little book to tell straightforwardly the quiet but attractive story of Whittier's life. I have sought to give its salient events in such a manner that the essential characteristics of the man might be brought out, and his qualities as an author thereby explained. Detailed criticism of his works has been shunned, as contrary to the plan, the scope, of the biography: existing contributions of that kind are ample and authoritative. At the same time such estimates of Whittier's poetry have been given as shall make plain his development of character and explain his important position in American letters. In a biography, especially in one so sternly compressed within narrow limits, the object of interest is the man in his work: whereas in literary criticism it may well be the work, for the better understanding of which we scrutinise the man.

Such has been the ideal in making this

volume, however far short of it I may have fallen. I will only add that there is a peculiar satisfaction in studying a man, a maker of literature, like John Greenleaf Whittier, because of the beautiful correspondence between his life and his work. The student comes to feel that, in the high words of Lanier,—

*“His song was only living aloud;
His work, a singing with his hand.”*

R. B.

MINNEAPOLIS, October, 1900.

CHRONOLOGY.

1807

December 17. John Greenleaf Whittier was born at Haverhill, Massachusetts.

1815

December 7. Elizabeth Whittier was born.

1826

June 8. Whittier's first published poem, "The Exile's Departure," appeared in the Newburyport *Free Press*.

1827

May 1. Entered Haverhill Academy, where he spent two terms of six months each.

1828-29

Spent the winter in Boston, editing the *American Manufacturer*.

1830

Began editing the Haverhill *Gazette*. Went to Hartford to edit the *New England Review*.

1831

Published his first book, *Legends of New England.*

1832

Published *Moll Pitcher.*

1833

Published *Justice and Expediency.*

November. Went to Philadelphia as delegate to National Anti-slavery Society.

December. One of the committee to draft the “Declaration of Sentiments.”

1835

Elected Representative of Haverhill in State legislature.

Stoned by a mob in Concord, New Hampshire.

1836

Again assumed editorial charge of the Haverhill *Gazette.*

Sold the Haverhill farm, and removed to Amesbury.

Published *Mogg Megone.*

1837

Isaac Knapp, of Boston, published first edition of Whittier's poems, entitled *Poems written during the Progress of the Abolition Question in the United States, between the Years 1830 and 1838.*

1838

Became editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* of Philadelphia.

May 17. Pennsylvania Hall, in which was Whittier's office, burned by a mob.

1840

February. Severed his connection with the *Freeman*, and returned to Amesbury.

1843

Published *Lays of my Home, and Other Poems.*

1844

Went to Lowell for six months to edit the *Middlesex Standard*.

1845

Published *The Stranger in Lowell.*

1847

Began writing for the Washington *National Era*.

1849

Published *Voices of Freedom*.

1850

Published *Songs of Labour*,

1854

Published "Maud Muller" in the *Era*.

1857

Whittier's mother died.

Contributed poem entitled "The Gift of Tritemius" to the initial number of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

Ticknor & Fields published complete edition of Whittier's poems, known as "Blue and Gold Edition."

1858

Published "Telling the Bees" in the *Atlantic*.

Elected Overseer of Harvard College.

1860

Published *Home Ballads, and Other Poems*.

1860 (*continued*)

Member of the electoral college.

Received the degree of M.A. from Harvard.

1863

Published *In War Time, and Other Poems.*

1864

Elizabeth Whittier died.

1866

Published *Snow-Bound* and prose work in two volumes.

Received degree of LL.D. from Brown University.

1867

Published *The Tent on the Beach.*

1868

Published *Among the Hills, and Other Poems.*

1870

Published *Miriam, and Other Poems.*

1874

Published *Mabel Martin.*

1876

Removed to Oak Knoll, Danvers.

Wrote the Centennial Hymn for the Exposition at Philadelphia.

1877

December 17. Dinner, in honour of Whittier, given by Houghton, Mifflin & Co. to the contributors of the *Atlantic Monthly*.

1881

Published *The King's Missive, and Other Poems*.

1886

Published *St. Gregory's Guest, and Other Poems*.

1888

Riverside Edition of Whittier's writings was published.

1892

Published *At Sundown*.

September 7. John Greenleaf Whittier died at Hampton Falls, New Hampshire.

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER.

I.

LONGFELLOW has declared that an autobiography is what a biography ought to be. Conversely, any piece of biographical writing should have an autobiographic quality ; should be an impression, an interpretation, quite as much as a summary of facts. Facts, to be sure, are of use as wholesome correctives of prejudice or whimsy ; but in the condensed narrative of a life there is danger that they may tyrannise.

In studying a clear-cut, sane, noble character like Whittier's, however, interpretation follows fact in a straight line of derivation. There is small excuse for indirection or puzzling. Perhaps no man is a saint to his biographer. But, for a type like Whittier, some such epithet seems to hit nearer the mark than a subtler word. The tragic two-sidedness more often found in men, and

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expressed imaginatively by the case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, does not appear in the Whittier mould. But this is not saying that Whittier was not every inch a man. His goodness came through struggle, and was the positive expression of a strong nature. One of the lessons to be drawn from the story of his days is that his career was broader than that of the recluse man of letters ; one in which life was reckoned as more than literature, with the result that the literature it evoked was always an honest outcome of the life itself.

Ancestry, remote and immediate, plays a part in the formation of character increasingly important in our present-day biologic view ; when exaggerated, indeed, pushing into pure fatalism. Certainly, any man is largely explained in and by his forbears. Whittier's were sturdy farmer-folk, able-bodied, strong-minded, God-fearing, an exceeding good stock to come from — none better, one is

inclined to say, remembering the similar genealogy of many notable Americans as well as men of other lands. It is a more accurate use of the phrase than is customary to say that the poet was of a good family. When Whittier was born, his ancestors had been for more than one hundred and fifty years in a corner of Massachusetts. Their roots went down deep into the soil. The seventeenth-century Thomas Whittier, who, with several of his kin, came from England to Boston in 1638, and settled in Salisbury near Amesbury (afterwards to be made famous by his descendant), was a strong man of his hands, a giant in stature, a man, too, of mental and moral strength: hence one of mark among his neighbours—as we see by sundry positions of trust which he held. In 1647 he moved to Haverhill, built a log house, and, when well on in years, cut the oaken beams for the Whittier homestead wherein John Greenleaf Whittier, most

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distinguished of the name, was born December 17, 1807. The poet thus had the advantage of passing his youth in a paternal dwelling murmurous with family traditions for more than a century, and of being country-bred—a good thing for anybody, for a man of song almost a birthright.

Thomas Whittier lived through the troublous Indian times, and was known as a fearless friend of the red man. He was well inclined, too, towards the Quakers, though not himself of their sect. There is record to show that his skilful services were often called upon for road-laying and like necessary work. The poet derives through the youngest son, Joseph by name, whose marriage in 1694 with Mary Peasley, Haverhill's leading Quaker, brings in the spiritual influence which was controlling in subsequent generations.

This Joseph's son, of the same name, married Sarah Greenleaf in 1739, and

their son Joseph had eleven children, of whom John and Moses bought the Haverhill farm of the other heirs, and devoted themselves to its cultivation. Of the brother John, who in 1804 married Abigail Hussey, the second child of four was John Greenleaf. Among the others, the most interesting to us is Elizabeth Whittier, a sister around whom gather associations hardly less lovely than those that make forever melodious William Wordsworth's dear housemate Dorothy.

Whittier's most marked personal traits seem to have been derived from the maternal stock. His mother was descended from a family of distinction in England ; on her mother's side from the rather remarkable sixteenth-century parson, Stephen Bacheler. It was from this stalwart non-conformist, who came to America when over seventy, planted the town of Hampton, New Hampshire, married a child-wife, and, returning to

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England at the age of ninety-two, lived to be well-nigh one hundred, that John Greenleaf Whittier got his brilliant brown eye ; and in character, it may be, some part at least of his resolute will and zeal for reform. One can but cherish more sympathetic feelings for Whittier's mother than for his other parent. She it was who was interested especially in his securing an education, and lent a kindly ear to his fledgling literary efforts. Her portrait reveals a face uniting sweetness and strength. In her presence were dignity and charm. The intellectual sympathy between her and her son — close and constant for half a century — was remarkable. It recalls Goethe's relation to that sprightly and keen-witted mother of his. Not always are poets thus blessed in their mothers. John, the father, although for the place and time a man of unusual cultivation, and possessing decided vigour of mind, was a man of action

rather than of speech, and first and foremost a farmer, who desired his son to follow in his footsteps ; also a Quaker who looked somewhat askance at the boy's literary leanings. It is worth noting that for several generations, in the direct line of descent, Whittier's ancestors, like himself, were children born late in wedlock, his own father being forty-eight at the poet's birth.

The predominance of mental and spiritual qualities in this frail-bodied son of a sturdy race may have a close connection with this biologic detail. Whittier, like Stevenson and Lanier, was all his life delicate, holding his health upon an uncertain tenure ; and his career was vitally affected by the circumstance. The glowing eyes in the thin, ascetic face bespoke the invalid who was yet surcharged with an alert activity, and did right cheerily a man's work in the world.

The Whittier homestead was situated

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in the east parish of Haverhill, "in that
angle of Massachusetts," as *Ik Marvel*
puts it, "where the Merrimac, weary of
its spindles, finds its way, near the old
town of Newburyport, into the sea." Essex
County, in the north-eastern corner
of the State, borders on New Hampshire—part of Haverhill was once in
the Granite State—and in scenery has
more of its rugged contours than of the
pastoral effects of southerly Massachusetts. The town is in a bold hill country,
set about by dome-shaped hills covered
with a thick growth of wood. No neighbour's house was visible from the Whittier
place, which is some three miles out
from the present city of forty thousand
inhabitants, and just off the main
road leading to Amesbury. The valley
seemed shut away from the world; yet
so close was the ocean that its waters
could be seen from an elevation, and in
the imagination its note could be faintly
heard. Near by, Great Hill, often

climbed by Whittier as boy and man, commands a view of many towns, with Monadnock and Wachusett dominant in the landscape. The situation of the home is described in the poet's own happy words : ("It was surrounded by woods in all directions save to the south-east, where a break in the leafy wall revealed a vista of low, green meadows, picturesque with wooded islands and jutting capes of upland. Through these a small brook, noisy enough as it foamed, rippled and laughed down its rocky falls, by our garden side, wound, silently and scarcely visible, to a still larger stream, known as the Country Brook. This brook in its turn, after doing duty at two or three saw and grist mills, the clack of which we could hear in clear days across the intervening woodlands, found its way to the great river ; and the river took it up, and bore it down to the great sea.") An ideal environment this, one instinctively exclaims, for a nature poet.

The house itself, now familiar to the world in pictures and open to the literary pilgrim, is a plain, substantial structure, with a row of Lombardy poplars, at the time of Whittier's boyhood, at the gate, and a big barn across the road. In that most autobiographic of poems, *Snow-Bound*, besides the etchings of the inmates of the home, there are many still-life touches vividly reproducing these early external surroundings.

The house, too, was not a bad one for an imaginative lad to live in, with its big kitchen, whose fireplace was eight feet between jambs—one of the good old-fashioned sort, as sure to have its crane as the well outside was to have its well-sweep. One can fancy the young Whittier reading before this ample hearthstone by candle-light or playing some homely game, perhaps, on the polished deal table, about which the family commonly gathered, or, again, dreaming on rainy days in the

oak-ribbed, ancient attic. He listened with wide-eyed wonder to the romantic tales told him by Uncle Moses, a member of the household. Leading directly to this conjuring-place above was the boy's bedroom in the second story — an unfinished room, with the dark old rafters showing and the stairs a mere ladder, perhaps the better loved. His mother's tiny bedroom off the ample kitchen bespeaks rigid economy of space ; yet the house as a whole, with its carefully preserved quaint furniture and air of comfort, makes an impression of generous size on the visitor to-day ; moreover, of quiet dignity and gentility. It was no peasant's home. The group about the Haverhill hearth was a very different one from that limned in "*The Cotter's Saturday Night.*" And the boy took his share in the farm duties. His lack of bodily vigour made some of the chores rather hard, an injury received in stone-lifting making the case worse.

A good deal of the work was done, we gather, of necessity rather than with relish. Whittier always believed that early exposure to wind and weather in those charming old days, when clothing was alarmingly unhygienic, begot the physical unsoundness that so hampered him in later life. The farm work had its good side, however; for the boy loved animals, and had much fun with the horses and cattle. Then he was forced to be much in the open air, and had the fellowship of nature's beauty, which was unconsciously absorbed, to be given out in after time to the world in verse that best revealed his genius. Nor must it be understood that the young John kicked against the pricks in facing his homely tasks. He says himself that he "found about equal satisfaction in an old rural home, with the shifting panorama of the seasons, in reading a few books within my reach, and dreaming of something won-

derful and good somewhere in the future." A young fellow of imagination all compact under such circumstances can always exclaim with Dyer, "My mind to me a kingdom is."

And indoors he was devouring whatever in the way of books he could lay his hands on, the provender being scant. Few books were to be found in a New England farm-house even of the better class in those days of the young century. Most of the volumes on John the senior's shelves had to do with the somewhat dry literature of early Quakerism. But the Bible was handy, and truly handled ; and no American poet — no modern poet, indeed — was better nourished on that great collection of writings. As rock-bed for future building, nothing could be of more value in the education of a man of letters. Ruskin's eloquent testimony to his "maternal installation" in the Scriptures may be given wide application.

Whittier's first schooling was got from an intermittent attendance at the district school half a mile away; and a teacher there, one Joshua Coffin, of dim renown as antiquarian and local historian, brought him a copy of Robert Burns, with the result that the homely little volume of the Scotch bard was a veritable Aladdin's lamp to the magic world of poesy. And the young rhymer's first efforts (he began them as a small boy) savoured, naturally enough, of that earlier people-poet. A little before, his imagination had been fired by the coming to the farm of a Scotch "wandering Willie," who had recited some of Burns's lyrics to the lad after the manner of the itinerant ballad-monger, dialect and all. Until he was nineteen the district school stood for all of Whittier's formal education; but in any general estimate of his unfolding powers the legendary stories of his uncle, the allurements of river, hill, and

meadow, of earth and sky, the readings from the Bible, or the occasional standard poet who found his way into the house — all these must be reckoned with. Educational advantages fuller a hundred-fold are often made less of. Whittier was emphatically a self-made man in the noblest sense. His education was not time-limited by school or college: it reached through his whole long life. The letters of his maturity are those of a widely read and cultivated man — a little fond, in fact, of airing a classic allusion — as who should say, such things are not for the college-bred alone! But to such a man the will to learn is more than a prescribed curriculum. His sheepskin is signed by the wise headmaster, Experience.

Whittier's natural faculty in verse-making stood him in good stead in the getting of so much academic training as was to fall to his lot. Poetical contributions during 1826 to the *Free Press* of

Newburyport and the *Gazette* of Haverhill led the respective editors, William Lloyd Garrison and A. W. Thayer, in turn to seek the young writer's father, and urge him to send his promising son to the Haverhill Academy. The elder Whittier yielded, though, as it appears, half grudgingly: scholastic culture did not seem altogether a proper ideal to the devout Quaker of that time. The stipulation was that young John should pay his own way, which he did by making slippers at twenty-five cents the pair, and so went blithely to the academy for six months, making an auspicious start; for an ode of his composition was sung at the exercises opening the new building. The poetising had been under way for years. In his early teens rhymes were concocted in the little bedroom over his mother's room, before the old desk, which, recovered and refurnished by friends, it was his pleasure to use for such purposes in after years. Tradition

has it that his first attempts at versifying were made upon the beam of his mother's loom—a report so pleasantly congruous with the homeliness of the poet's early surroundings that one may at least call it well found.

Two terms at the academy constituted the sum and substance of Whittier's higher schooling, the second term being broken by a turn at school-teaching in the winter of 1827-28. That he made good use of his time may be well believed. Access to the libraries of the town was a valuable adjunct to the academic experience. The riches of the older English literature were opened to him, and his own style was moulded by this influence for high uses to come. The first thought is one of regret that Whittier could not have had a longer time for his conventional learning years. He was the kind to make the most of them. Yet, as already hinted, in the light of his after career, it may be felt that, along

with the loss inevitable to such a restriction of a liberal culture, went some compensatory gain. During this period of his studies he continued to turn out a great deal of verse. Nearly ninety pieces appeared in the *Gazette* alone during 1827-28, most of them signed by pen-names or initials. He was becoming accustomed to seeing himself in print. The "first wild careless rapture" had moderated since that day when, as he worked with his father on the home farm, tugging away at a stone for a stone wall, the postman rode by on horseback, and tossed him a copy of the *Free Press* of Newburyport, which contained in the poet's corner, to his dazed delight, "The Exile's Departure," his first printed poem. It had been surreptitiously sent by sister Mary. Such raptures are not recurrent. But by this time his hopes fed more soaring ambitions.

At this time Whittier in personal ap-

pearance was, in the words of an intimate woman friend, "a very handsome, distinguished-looking young man. His eyes were remarkably beautiful. He was tall, slight, and very erect; a bashful youth, but never awkward." The likenesses of him, especially those taken in maturity or old age, and hence more familiar to the general public, accentuate the austerity of his countenance. His face in repose—if that horrid rigour which is the average photographer's opportunity can be so called—had this severe cast; but all the pictures lose the mobile play of the features and the illuminating smile and eye, which made a far more winning effect. It may be added that the pictures taken in old age represent him when he had lost all his teeth, and the expression of the mouth was affected thereby. From various testimony it may be gathered that he was of lively disposition, of much wit, inclined to playful teasing at times, mod-

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est, keenly sensitive to the humourous
despite his gravely decorous demeanour.
Evidently, he was just the sort of young
fellow to be at his best with his inti-
mates, and likely to be misread by the
casual observer.

He showed thus early that interest in
current events and local history which
was to be so marked a characteristic of
his whole life, planning a history of
the town of Haverhill, for example, and
working with his pen and by other prac-
tical means against such evils as war and
the rum-shop. It is necessary to realise
at the threshold of this man's career that
along with the idealist's singing strain in
him went a hard-headed practicality and
gift for affairs that hint at a farmer in-
heritance. The school-days over, and
the young man, his majority almost at-
tained, in the common position of young
men, eager for life's work, but unaware
what they are destined to do, help came
by way of a suggestion from Whittier's

friend Garrison, who was now editing in Boston that pioneer temperance paper, the *Philanthropist*. The editorship was offered to the Haverhill poet, as Garrison wished to give his time to other reform work. This post, after due reflection—the sort of solemn, pious consideration which the elder generation was wont to give important steps in life—was accepted. Thus began Whittier's connection with journalism, which was throughout his years a shaping influence. In this channel much of his most fruitful power moved and had its being. His work as a reformer, through the medium of the press, inclusive of his verse contributions of a polemic character, seemed, in fact, during a good share of his lifetime his main achievement. It is only in the light of retrospect that his transcendent worth as a singer of songs—homely, legendary, and spiritual—comes to be appreciated to the full.

II.

FROM the time he assumed charge in Boston of the political weekly, the *American Manufacturer*, published, like the *Philanthropist*, by the Colliers, Whittier's chief work was editorial for a period of four years, with, however, a steady prosecution of writing of a more literary nature — miscellaneous poems and prose sketches. Those years were very important, both as affording him plenty of practice in verse-making and in giving vent to his interests in questions of the day. His paper was a Henry Clay organ. In it he discussed the tariff question, and favoured protection at a time when to do so was daring. Thereby he made political capital in Massachusetts. His gift of verse was used in the advocacy of temperance or against war and slavery. The position he took on these vital matters already indicated the definite stand he was later to make as

a reformer ; but as yet slavery had not become a burning issue, and the young editor did not jeopardise his future by the broadsides he delivered. The early verse written by Whittier, however imitative in subject or crude in quality when compared with the poetry of his prime, had a natural lyrical movement which even then marked him out (for the knowing) as one called to song. The usual criticisms passed on his art, in its technical limitations, should not blind any one to the fact that, at his worst, Whittier shows an inborn aptitude for numbers.

After less than two years in Boston, he returned to Haverhill to see his father die. Whittier's whole career was turned aside from steady progress by family complications as well as by his own ill-health. But at home he did not cease from journalistic connections, editing the local *Gazette* and contributing as a free lance to various other papers,

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especially the *New England Review* of Hartford, Connecticut, the conduct of which he accepted after the death of his father left him free. The paper, till then edited by George D. Prentice, was also of the Henry Clay stripe. Whittier's election to its editorship was a distinct compliment, quite as much to his political sagacity as to his literary powers. The quiet, saintly poet (as we now think of him) had a shrewd head on his shoulders for matters political. He was, indeed, for many years confidentially consulted by important leaders, and was very influential with pen and in person. Thus he moved towards the political position of which he was ambitious, until his now honoured but then well-hated anti-slavery zeal killed forever his chances in this field. The letters and facts put in evidence in Mr. Pickard's *Life of Whittier* establish this beyond peradventure.

The Hartford residence extended his

political experience, and brought him into enjoyable social relation with persons of consideration — notably, Mrs. Sigourney, the favourite early singer of Connecticut. Again ill-health set a brief term to his work, which he continued for some time after removal to Haverhill, but resigned entirely at the beginning of 1832 — reluctantly, by his own confession, for he had become interested in the politics of Connecticut, and liked Hartford, which, though lacking its subsequent literary associations, was a little city of bustling social life and some intellectual stir. It was while in Hartford that he prepared and published from the office of the *Review* his first book, *Legends of New England in Prose and Verse*. Most of the work it contained he wisely excluded from his collective editions, paying fancy prices, indeed, for stray volumes in after years, that these “unconsidered trifles” might be suppressed. Yet they show charac-

teristic traits—love for native story, facility in narrative, a deep, underlying feeling for the pathos inherent in common things, and a sure perception of the place of the spiritual in life. To this time, too, belongs the narrative poem, *Moll Pitcher*, afterwards condemned by his mature judgment as violent and truculent.

Whittier, while in Hartford, had entered into close affiliations with the Whig party in that section, and had crossed swords with Gideon Welles, the local champion of Democracy. When appointed a delegate from Connecticut to the convention of the National Republican party to be held in Baltimore in December of 1831, he had accepted the duty and started for the place of meeting, but because of indisposition got no further than Boston. This experience is illustrative of the next thirty years of his life. He was forced, for the same reason, to keep in the background

of State and national affairs when taste and ambition called him strongly in their direction. An element of pathos lies in this constant balking of his best-laid plans, but the consolation is obvious. The country might have gained a high-souled statesman at the expense of a dearly loved and truly representative bard. It must not be understood, however, that Whittier took to verse-writing as a *pis-aller*. His feeling for it was deep, even solemn. In a letter to Mrs. Sigourney, he says: "The truth is, I love poetry with a love as warm, as fervent, as sincere as any of the more gifted worshippers at the shrine of the Muses. I consider its gift as holy and above the fashion of the world."

This year of 1832 in some sense marks the parting of the ways for Whittier. He had been before the public some half a dozen years as a poet, and acquired considerable reputation. His verse had been widely copied and praised. Over

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one hundred poems from his pen had
appeared. He had also gained some
prominence as editor and political
leader; and he was a very young man
—only twenty-five years of age. The
future was bright before him. Barring
ill-health, there was no cloud in his sky.
The friendship of Caleb Cushing, of
Newburyport, whom he had helped to
a seat in Congress, was an anchor to
windward in Whittier's coming political
career. But now, with these fair pros-
pects, voluntarily, deliberately, and,
no doubt, fully aware of its effect upon
his future, the young fellow—it was
the harder and braver for a young man
to take such a step—stood forth along
with Garrison as a defender of anti-
slavery principles. He studied the
question carefully before the decision
was made. It was not the way of
Whittier's mind then or thereafter to
go off half-cocked. Long afterwards
Colonel Higginson characterised him as

the “keen-eyed, cool Whittier.” But, once his conscience was clear, the stand was final. For over thirty years he was to wear the yoke of an unpopular cause ; to be snubbed, cold-shouldered, reviled, even stoned ; to be injured in his literary fame ; to be hurt in the house of his friends. But his stanch devotion had its reward, emphatic and splendid. He lived to see the cause of freedom triumph ; to realise that one of his surest claims to the high name of singer rested upon the flaming words he had spoken for the down-trodden of the earth. He lived to hear himself reckoned, along with Garrison, Phillips, Sumner, and Mrs. Stowe, as one of the co-efficients of fate in saving a nation from lasting infamy. Long afterwards he wrote : “For twenty years I was shut out from the favour of booksellers and magazine editors ; but I was enabled by rigid economy to live in spite of them, and to see the end of the infernal insti-

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tution which proscribed me. Thank
God for it."

Whittier did not believe in war. He was in sympathy with the peaceful leanings of his sect. This attitude was not the result of a tame effeminacy. There was red blood under the prim-cut Quaker black, and no lack of spirit on occasion. He says himself that it took long years to discipline the Adam in him. The Puritans were good fighters in a righteous cause ; and there was a Bachelor strain in him as well as a Whittier, be it remembered. And, in accepting the slavery cause as his own, he put on the armour of battle for the God of righteousness. He became not only the laureate of the Liberty party, but a worker in the ranks, upon whom fell the heat and burden of the day. His pronunciamento was the pamphlet published in Haverhill at his own expense in 1833, when he could ill afford it, and entitled *Justice and Expediency ; or, Slavery Considered with a View*

to its Rightful and Effectual Remedy, Abolition. It is a thorough-going, uncompromising, able, and often eloquent statement of the abolitionist's position. This message was a challenge to the South, too bold and defiant not to make powerful enemies for the writer. One of its inevitable consequences was to bring him into closer relations with Garrison, who shortly before had started the despised but eventually mighty *Liberator* in Washington, where, helped by Isaac Knapp and a negro boy, and setting up type, as it were, with one hand while he wrote with the other, he fulminated for "unconditional emancipation."

In December of 1833 Whittier was a delegate to the National Anti-slavery Convention at Philadelphia and a signer of the Declaration of Sentiments. Constantly his pen was plied for newspapers in the interests of the cause he had espoused. His poems of the period were prevailingly on the theme. His letters,

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public and private, to influential friends in office indicate an astonishing political sagacity directed to this one noble end. Using the words in an inoffensive implication, Whittier was a gifted politician, a good lobbyist. Along with a lofty idealism went in him a great deal of practical common sense and shrewd capacity for affairs—an inherited trait from his farmer forbears. The letters quoted by Mr. Pickard bring this out in a striking way. Whittier felt that so long as a party stood for great principles, flaws in its leaders or inconsistencies in its platform might be overlooked. Hence, when more uncompromising men like Garrison and Sumner were intolerant of the existing order, he counselled toleration, and stuck to the party, practising the Biblical union of serpentine wisdom and dovelike gentleness. Thus, whatever the mistakes of the successive parties, he was in turn a stanch Whig, Liberal, and Free Soiler. Unlike Gar-

rison, who wished to overthrow the Constitution, Whittier believed that slavery could be overborne by the agency of party politics and without the subversion of that great political instrument ; and his faith was to be justified, though the mills of the gods ground slow.

That his local community and State appreciated his character and ability is demonstrated by his election in 1835 to the State legislature and re-election the following year ; but he declined to serve for more than one year. It is evident that, had it not been for his adherence to a position of growing unpopularity, the political career so auspiciously begun would not have been untimely checked. But, in spite of the withdrawal from actual office, he remained for many years a potent force at the State House, a familiar figure there.

And now the days of his persecution were at hand. The feeling against the

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abolitionists was daily deepening, and riotous proceedings were frequent in various places. The Rev. Samuel J. May attempted to give an anti-slavery lecture on a Sunday evening of August, 1835, in Whittier's native town and for the society of which he was corresponding secretary. The meeting was broken up by a mob outside the walls of the church, which hooted, threw stones, and otherwise rudely disported itself to the general discomfiture of the ladies in the audience, among whom were Whittier's sister Elizabeth and his especial friend, Harriet Minot. They, being well-known to the assailants, were allowed to protect the speaker from personal harm by walking on either side of him as he came forth from the building. The poet himself was not in Haverhill at the time, but was undergoing similar treatment in the neighbour State of New Hampshire. The English abolitionist orator, George Thompson, was lectur-

ing in this country, and, to escape the violence of a Salem mob, had lain hidden in Whittier's house for two weeks. The two started thence in company to drive to Plymouth, New Hampshire, purposing to visit N. P. Rogers, a fellow abolitionist and long-time friend of the poet. On the way they stopped over night at Concord, where it was arranged that a meeting should be held on the return trip. But on the arrival of the twain, Whittier, who was mistaken for Thompson, was set upon by several hundred men, who threw stones, mud, and rotten eggs at him, despite his Quaker garb, so that he was somewhat lamed and his clothes were ruined, though luckily no serious injury was the result. The proposed meeting was given up ; and the crowd, inflamed by liquor and the use of fire-arms, became so unruly in the course of the night that the two reformers deemed it the better part of valour to effect an escape, which they

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did in the early morning by a side door, driving out of town by the only road not guarded by the enemy. Only a month later Whittier saw Garrison, with a rope round his neck, dragged through the streets of Boston by a mob which had broken up a meeting of the Female Anti-slavery Society ; and afterwards he visited his friend in prison. Two years later, in 1837, at an Essex County Anti-slavery Convention held at Newburyport, Massachusetts, Whittier again saw the meeting terminated by violence, the speakers, himself included, deafened by fish-horns and rudely entreated, he being, in his own words, “assailed with decayed eggs, sticks, and light missiles,” until he departed at what he describes as “an undignified” but certainly justifiable “trot.” A year or two after this, in Philadelphia, he witnessed another scene of unruly excitement due to the same cause. As we read his campaign literature from the vantage-

point of a later generation, when the passions heated by the moot questions of that day have been cooled by the touch of time and settled by the disposition of history, if poem or prose screed seem partisan and intemperate at times, be it remembered that they were the outcome of experiences that went to the quick of Whittier's soul. The effect upon his writings of the stand he took for anti-slavery—an effect more vividly grasped through the recollection of scenes like these—was hardly less than revolutionary. Before, his verse had been academic in theme and tone, though high in sentiment, and with a feeling for spiritual issues; but now it became definite, vital, intense. It is not too much to say that the cause of the black man gave his Pegasus wings. The grooming necessary to give the horse its final appearance—that was to come gradually with the years. But a large subject and a spontaneous impulse

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come before and are most important of all.

During his residence in Haverhill following upon the return from Connecticut, besides the management of the farm of his forefathers and his political duties in Boston, he edited the Haverhill *Gazette* for some months, thus keeping in touch with journalism, and wrote much miscellaneous verse. He published, too, an early work, the Indian narrative poem, *Mogg Megone*, begun in Hartford, which has always been retained in the general editions of his works, though finally relegated to the appendix—where an author often retains early and disapproved work, in self-protection against garbled editions. Whatever the general truculence of the tone of this poem, the reader may remember that it contains an eloquent stanza invoking peace in place of war.

A change in the home life must be chronicled here. In 1836 the paternal

farm was sold for three thousand dollars ; and the family moved to Amesbury, some eight miles away, where a modest house was purchased. The poet was thus relieved of an arduous and not too congenial care, and was enabled to give his time to literature and reform. On the more practical side, the Whittiers were brought nearer to the Friends' meeting-house, which was located near by, on the same Amesbury street. It was this Amesbury cottage which, with alterations and improvements, made the main home of the poet for the rest of his days—over half a century. After this removal, one thinks of him, in the flush of manhood, writing in the little study overlooking the garden and ever known to family and friends as the Garden Room, the burning songs which, grouped later as the *Voices of Freedom*, were to do so much to hold up the hands of those fain to set free the slave. Of this period were such well-known lyrics

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as "Toussaint L'Ouverture," "The
Yankee Girl," "The Hunters of Men,"
"Song of the Free," and "Ritner."
They appeared in the *Liberator*, the *New
England Magazine*, the Boston *Courier*,
and his own *Gazette*.

But this quiet, fruitful home life was
soon to change. In the spring of 1837
Whittier was called to be the editor of
the *Pennsylvania Freeman* of Philadel-
phia, a journal with a name which
clearly indicated its intention; and,
after some months' consideration, he ac-
cepted the invitation, and removed to
the Quaker city. One of his latest ac-
tions before the Southern journey was to
pass several weeks in the Boston legisla-
ture, seeking to induce its members to
express displeasure at Van Buren's in-
augural address, which, by its Southern
leanings, had given sore offence to the
abolitionists.

III.

BEFORE he went to Philadelphia, Whittier spent several months in New York City as a secretary of the American Anti-slavery Society, working elbow to elbow with other such reformers as James G. Birney, Theodore D. Weld, and Elizur Wright in the cause they loved. The writing of party literature, the arranging for lectures, and the inaugurating of an underground railroad for fugitive slaves kept them busy. His health, as always, forbade long office hours ; but no one of the devoted circle was more unremitting in labour. It was during this New York residence that Whittier met Lucy Hooper, the young Massachusetts poet, whom he has tenderly memorialised in the elegy written when she died, four years later, at the age of twenty-four, and in the pensively beautiful lyric revised in after years. It is now conceded that “*Memories*”

has an autobiographic value. The romance of his early manhood—in all likelihood the one lyric passage of his life—centred in this gifted girl. Whittier was a bachelor through circumstances rather than by conviction. To a correspondent he declared that the “care of an aged mother, the duty owed to a sister in delicate health for many years, must be my excuse for living the lonely life which has called out thy pity. . . . I know there has something very sweet and beautiful been missed, but I have no reason to complain. I have learned, at least, to look into happiness through the eyes of others, and to thank God for the happy unions and holy firesides I have known.” Uniformly throughout his life, as many letters testify, Whittier’s attitude towards marriage was half-playfully, half-tenderly regretful. He was no sour misogynist. When James T. Fields married, he wrote in the vein of winsome humour

that was one of his charms: "Bachelor as I am, I congratulate thee on thy escape from single (misery) blessedness. It is the very wisest thing thee ever did. Were I autocrat, I would see to it that every young man over twenty-five and every young woman over twenty was married without delay. Perhaps, on second thought, it might be well to keep one old maid and one old bachelor in each town, by way of warning, just as the Spartans did their drunken helots." It may easily be imagined that, had his environment and obligations been different, he would early have married. His admiration for woman, constant and warm, had in it the worshipful note of a Sir Galahad. The friendships he formed with women were many, and among the most delightful and influential in his experience. Witness the exchange of letters between him and Lydia Maria Child, Celia Thaxter, Lucy Larcom, Mrs. James T. Fields, Miss Edna

Dean Proctor, Miss Sarah Orne Jewett, — to name but a few that spring to mind. It lends a touch of pathos to one's thought of the Quaker bard to realise that Lucy Hooper was for him, in all probability, the ideal which ever after transfigured the love relation. The sadness of his own "It might have been" clings to her name like a dim fragrance.

The life in Philadelphia was sufficiently stirring. Whittier lived with the Thayers, Quaker friends of the Haverhill days, and wrought quietly but powerfully with his pen, going little into social circles. Of the friends then made was John Dickinson, father of that striking personality of war days, Anna E. Dickinson, whose sister Susan has given us a description of the poet at this time in connection with the exciting episode of the sacking and burning of Pennsylvania Hall, in which was Whittier's newspaper office containing his books

and papers. The testimony is that he was, so far as outward seeming goes, calm and quiet as he hurried about, helping those in threat of mob violence or the fierce element of flame. As he recounted it long afterwards, he stood by the side of that sturdy old-time abolitionist, Daniel Neall, as he presided at a meeting in the hall, "while the mob was pressing in the doors and the glass of the broken windows was shattered over him."

Pennsylvania Hall had just been erected, that there might be in the city a place where not only slavery, but general topics having to do with the rights of man, might be freely discussed. The leading champions of freedom were present at the dedicatory meetings, which finally, on the fourth day, were stopped by the warnings of a mob of fifteen thousand people, in collusion with the mayor of the town; and the building was then fired, the papers in

Whittier's editorial rooms, along with other handy material, being used as fuel. He worked in disguise, to save as much of his property as might be, and promptly published the paper, as usual, the next morning, declaring in a leader that the flame would be seen from Maine to Georgia, and that by its light men would recognise "more clearly than ever the black abominations of the fiend at whose instigation it was kindled." We may smile, perhaps, at the hyperbole; but then, we were not present at the burning of Pennsylvania Hall in the year of grace 1838. And this was only one of several riots which occurred in those history-making days.

It was after his removal to Philadelphia that the first general edition of his poems appeared under the significant title *Poems written during the Progress of the Abolition Question in the United States, between the Years 1830 and 1838*—long-winded enough to excite our wonder at

the leisurely manner of naming books of that day. Besides the verse which was printed in his own paper, the *Freeman*, he contributed to the *Democratic Review* of Washington, although its bias was pro-slavery. These early poems, whether fugitive or in book-form, brought him little or no financial reward. For a long time it was newspaper verse, and so regarded by contributor and editor. It entirely lacked the distinction gained from appearing in periodicals primarily literary in quality. Not until comparatively late in life—indeed, with the initiation of the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1857, and still more with the publication of *Snow-Bound* in 1866—did substantial returns for his literary work come to him. His early verse against slavery was a free-will offering to the cause.

Literary work was varied by trips to New York City, to Western Pennsylvania, or to Amesbury in quest of health

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or as an attendant upon some anti-slavery meeting. Whittier's watch of politics continued to be close and anxious. Men in high office were tried and found wanting by the one test of their attitude toward the question of liberating the black. Van Buren, at first hailed as a friend, was sorrowfully rejected when he wrote a temporising letter to North Carolina. Henry Clay, long loved and loyally aided, was repudiated when that brilliant statesman saw it to be to his interest to abandon his earlier position in favour of the abolitionists. What Whittier deemed Webster's tergiversation called forth the unforgettable lament "Ichabod." In the summer of 1839, when Whittier left his editorial post temporarily and returned home, he laboured zealously in his district to produce legislation for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and to restrict the interstate slave-trade, and, when in harness again,

agitated among the Pennsylvania politicians to the same purpose. When unable to attend anti-slavery meetings in person, he kept up his habit of writing open letters, which, read to sympathetic audiences, were potent to shape public opinion. But all this strenuous activity for the sake of what lay so near to his heart proved too much for his always frail physique. A heart trouble was discovered by the physicians, and editorial work prohibited. Early in 1840 he set his face towards Amesbury, accompanied by his beloved sister Elizabeth. The almost constant interruption or limitation of his career by physical ailments was to be a serious handicap for Whittier throughout his long and triumphantly fruitful life. Before he was forty years of age, he was told that his condition was precarious. Excitement was forbidden, and travel both in his own land and abroad consequently foregone—a hard restriction to one who

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naturally delighted in it. He was never able to attend entertainments that involved long sittings. The cardiac pains were oft-recurring, especially in middle life; and, less dangerous but more harassing headaches were a continual source of discomfort. Half an hour's use of the pen or eyes in reading brought on this head-pain. As a result of these afflictions, Whittier was forced to adopt many of the habits of the valetudinarian, and to absent himself from all sorts of social occasions where a disposition lively by nature and a sincere interest in his fellow human beings would have made his presence welcome. Yet, despite all this, he outlived almost all his contemporaries, and got through what was, in view of the conditions, an astonishing amount of labour as reformer and writer. There was an intense energy in him—a force of the spirit. Although his face was that of an invalid, this volatility of temperament spoke in the quick,

nervous step, the impression of one athletically alive conveyed by the very sight of his back as he walked briskly away.

Ten years of quiet, earnest, telling work—in the decade between 1840 and 1850—followed upon the return to the Amesbury home. There those dear to him were still gathered : Uncle Moses, man of imagination, whose stories had stirred his youth ; the maiden aunt, Mercy, who was to pass away before many years, in 1846 ; the beloved mother, who, unlike too many mothers, kept close in touch with her gifted son until she, too, was called ; and the sister Lizzie, a true house-mate, ever his confidant and faithful critic. Whittier, it may be repeated, was pre-eminently a home-keeping man. His favourite deity was the hearth goddess, Hestia. Bachelor though he was, he knew more of household joys than falls to the lot of the majority of mankind.

Unremittingly he laboured for the slave in the mean time. He helped to launch the new Liberty party and to nominate Birney, when it was felt by those who espoused the welfare of the slave that neither of the existing national parties was equal to the issue. And for literature (with his eye sternly on practical life) he produced many of his most characteristic pieces, to be published in such volumes as *Lays of my Home*, *Voices of Freedom*, and *Songs of Labour*. These struck several of the dominant notes which sounded through and made distinctive and dear the verse of this poet—the note of freedom and the note of home ; these, together with the praise of nature and the expression of personal faith—the song spiritual—running the gamut of his music. But, as one reads the record of his daily doings, his activity seems to be practical rather than literary, to have to do with affairs more than with books—which,

indeed, is the impression created steadily by Whittier's life up to the days after the war. Then, the great cause won for which he strove, and in which, though a believer in peace, he had yet fought right valiantly and made the pen full as mighty as the sword, he felt that he might properly consider his career as an agitator ended, and turn to the calmer duties and pleasures of homespun song. Again and again in his correspondence occur remarks to indicate that he looked at his literary work as an aside, the central thing being his work as reformer. Hence it was that when, later in life, he was hailed as a representative American poet, his pleasure in the appellation was tempered by doubt, and a sincere disqualifier sprang to his lips. It seemed to him his usefulness had lain in a less pretentious field of endeavour. There was no touch of mock-modesty in this. No one can read his letters, and fail to get a sense of it.

“I set a higher value,” he said, “on my name as appended to the anti-slavery declaration than on the title-page of any book.”

We have noted that Whittier’s work in politics was not confined to his efforts of persuasion by correspondence nor to his burning deliverances in verse. In his own district in Massachusetts, for example, in order to prevent the election of the regular Whig and Democratic candidates, who were cold to the cause, he stood himself for several years in succession as the third party candidate. His vote increased steadily ; and in 1843 it looked as if, pursuant to the advice of Daniel Webster, the Whigs would unite with the Liberty people and elect Whittier ; whereupon, alarmed, he withdrew his name. By this time all thought of following a political career — once so desired — had been abandoned. The state of his health proscribed it. That this was a trial to him, we know, since

marked natural aptitudes and tastes led him into that political hippodrome of which the too common courses are to be purified only by such men as he.

It gives one a sense of how truly Whittier had been writing without thought of remuneration, to recall that his volume, *Lays of my Home, and Other Poems*, published in 1843, when he was nearer forty than thirty years old, was the first edition of his works to bring him any reward worth mentioning. As yet he had no realisation of the market value of his wares. Every now and then some event of the moment drew from him a fiery lyric, as when the Latimer fugitive slave case in the Massachusetts courts evoked "Massachusetts to Virginia," one of his clear-sounding clarion calls. The poem, "Texas: Voice of New England," coming when the country was stirred to the depths over the question of the admission of that republic as a free State, is another il-

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lustration. It is not so easy to realise now the wide and immediate effect of Whittier's verse polemics at this time. Copied from paper to paper, they literally swept through the land and moulded the thought of the people. To bring about such a result, something more than virile verse is needed; namely, some large national issue by which the whole nation can be aroused, and array itself in opposing factions. The twenty years preceding the Civil War furnished a pretty steady supply of such motives. In our own day, at least until very recently, the prevailing issues have been such as to awaken less of passionate interest, and therefore to provide less stirring themes.

The ballads and narratives in the collection referred to indicated what felicitous use Whittier could make of the legendary material lying unquarried in the local soil he knew so well — knew with that deepest, tenderest knowledge of the

memory, the heart's memory of youth. Editorial work for papers in Lowell and Amesbury during this period further subdued his hand to the dye it worked in. In 1845 began the correspondence with Charles Sumner, which started a noble friendship, to be closed only with the latter's death. The two leaders, each in his way, for long years fought side by side. For the Free Soil party Whittier did yeoman service in the way of satiric verse ; and a favourite repository for it was found in the *National Era*, which Gamaliel Bradford, after issuing for years a similar publication in Cincinnati, started in Washington in 1847, and continued to bring out, undaunted by threats of personal indignity and actual attacks. This weekly, the organ of the American and Foreign Anti-slavery Society, and soon to win new fame as the agent which first introduced *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to the American people, was for a dozen years the magazine in which

Whittier's best poems were printed. He was, in fact, its corresponding editor from the first number to the death of Bradford in 1860. Under his kindly encouragement the paper attracted some of the ablest writers of the day—Lucy Larcom, the Cary sisters, Mrs. Southworth, "Grace Greenwood," Mrs. Stowe, and later Hawthorne, whose "The Great Stone Face" was published here. It was through its columns that Whittier's friendship with Bayard Taylor was begun, another of those close, mutually fervent relations, of which his life was so full. When an old man, he declared that fame was little to him. The world to him meant the people he had learned to love and who loved him. His whole story illuminates the saying.

Of his own verse, such familiar things as "Barclay of Ury," "Angels of Buena Vista," "Maud Muller," "The Hill-top," and "Ichabod" are a few of the many poems which first got into

print through the *Era*. In the neighbourhood of ninety poems by him are to be found in its columns, besides editorials and prose sketches, among the latter the pleasing historical study entitled *Leaves from Margaret Smith's Journal*. Through the troublous days of the Free Soil nomination of Van Buren and the set-back upon the passage of the Fugitive Slave Law, Whittier worked with hand and heart. He refused an offer to travel abroad, with expenses paid, and remained in the thick of the fight, striking strenuously to the end that anti-slavery might be represented by an influential political party — though as yet with more discouragement than success. But, as the retrospective eye may now see, events were fast shaping towards the mighty struggle whose outcome was to be emancipation for millions of men.

IV.

WITH the publication in 1849 of the first large edition of his works, Whittier was on a surer footing as an author. B. B. Mussey, the Boston publisher, paid him five hundred dollars and a percentage on the sales, and, when several editions of the book were called for, voluntarily increased the author's share of the profits—a story which might sound legendary, did we not have a later example to point to in the dealings between the publishers and the author of *Trilby*. Whittier was slowly creeping into an assured place in letters. He was quite aside, be it noted, from the Cambridge group. He did not respond to the centripetal pull of Boston. There was nothing fashionable about him or his work. Nor did he have an unobstructed field : the elder poets and thinkers were by this time in full voice. Hawthorne, Bryant, Emerson, Long-

fellow, Lowell, had been heard from, and in most cases had won positions. As yet, however, the Quaker poet had place and popularity (in any broad sense) to win.

Only a few years afterwards (in 1854) we find Ticknor & Fields publishing his prose essays under the title *Literary Recreations*, which reminds us that one of the warmest friendships of his life had been established with James T. Fields and with his wife, Annie Fields—a relation to be cemented and made permanent when the *Atlantic Monthly*, born in 1857, should come into Mr. Fields's hands. The 1849 edition of the poems was handsomely got up, and helped to give the poet authority as a writer. An examination of this collection brings out clearly the qualities of Whittier's Muse at this period ; and, though his best work was yet to be done, the judgment applies with little reservation to all he did. There are, on the one hand, fluent versi-

fication, a natural lyric flow and fervour, absolute sincerity, the love of nature and of human nature, especially in its homely types and phases ; and, flooding it all like an atmosphere, the belief in man's personal dignity and right to freedom, and the belief in God. To offset these virtues, his verse was often diffuse ; he had a facility for rhyming which at times led to superfluity ; his technique was by no means above reproach ; and the didacticism representing a conviction, which seemed at times to constitute the very headmark of his poetic personality, not seldom took the form of the moral tag, to the injury of the work. Whittier cannot be read to-day (particularly in his earlier writing) without a sense of this tendency, which gives him an old-fashioned flavour for us. The time he lived in, the state of art in the United States in the early and middle nineteenth century, sufficiently explain the tendency, the difference.

His growing reputation as a poet who stood as did no other for the conscience of the plain people of New England did not in any wise keep him from strenuous effort in the more or less grimy field of practical politics. Not for a moment did he take advantage of literary popularity to step down and out from the fierce struggle precedent to the war. In fact, the very impulse to poetical composition came from these dynamic events. Whittier took a main hand in effecting the coalition of the Free Soilers and Democrats, which in Massachusetts led to the election of Sumner to the Senate and started an historic career. The poet-reformer suffered another setback to his hopes in the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and through poems like the "Burial of Barbour" and "Marais du Cygne," dealing with drastic incidents of the conflict between Northern and Southern emigrants in the Western country, played a potent part

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in saving Kansas for free labour. There
was something epical in the very air of
those days. Western pioneers marched
to songs that voiced mighty principles.
A man like Whittier could ill be spared
from the procession of national progress.
His eye looked far beyond party.
“Show me a party cutting itself loose
from slavery,” he said, “and making
the protection of man the paramount
object, and I am ready to go with it,
heart and soul.” He would have had
Whig, Democrat, Free Soiler, or what
not, all unite as Americans in the com-
mon desire for liberty. His prose ut-
terances were impassioned, keen, often
sparkling with happy epithet and epi-
grammatic turn of phrase, as when to
the citizens of Amesbury and Salisbury
he wrote: “It is worse than folly to
talk of fighting slavery when we have
not yet agreed to vote against it. Our
business is with poll-boxes, not with car-
tridge boxes; with ballots, not bullets.”

Prescient, he saw that the South so far was stronger than the North because it was a unit in favour of slavery, whereas the other section was split up into factions and did not unite for freedom.

With the air thus electrically charged, it is no wonder that poem rapidly succeeded poem, and that in 1856 Ticknor & Fields thought it well to bring out another volume, *The Panorama, and Other Poems*, in which some of his standard successes are to be found, among them "Maud Muller," the authenticity of whose heroine the poet always valiantly defended, treasuring in his Amesbury house her picture and other memorials. Such lyrics as the "Burns," "Tauler," "The Barefoot Boy," and "The Kansas Emigrants" further indicate the value of the volume. Ballads, campaign songs, homely pastorals, and spiritual aspirations make it up. It was a representative collection, in which already there was less of the trail of the

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polemic. Whittier was to find his fullest voice and fairest flight in verse which, while resonant with moral emotion, should escape the partisan and ephemeral nature of too much of his earlier utterance. What the world chose from the mass of his writings as most characteristic and precious was written comparatively late in life—most of it after forty, much of it in the fifties, even sixties. How plainly this points to a poet of the heart and spirit rather than the passions! In the volume of 1856 there is a gain in art. The storm and stress of mid-manhood move therein, but tempered by the philosophic years.

Whittier's whole heart was in the election of Frémont, the Free Soil candidate. It was for this campaign he wrote the stirring "Song for the Time." To the poet, Frémont was a noble warrior whom Whittier had cheered beside a dying camp-fire, in an hour of deep depression, by his poem, "The Pass of

the Sierra." He was sorely tried by that leader's defeat, yet rallied at once to write a campaign song, prophesying better things in the next election, sounding the bugles to battle.

Hard upon the volume of 1856, and indicative of its success, followed in 1857 the Ticknor & Fields complete edition of his poems — the so-called Blue and Gold Edition, whose format the publishers had just given to Longfellow's works. Whittier had liked this edition of his fellow-poet, and expressed a desire to have his own poems brought out in similar style — a wish promptly carried out by Mr. Fields. This edition may be regarded as the full authentication of his place as poet. At the age of fifty he had come into his own. He was of national importance as a maker of literature. From this year, too, is to be reckoned an influence of importance in his subsequent literary life — the founding of the *Atlantic Monthly* in Boston. This famous

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magazine — which meant so much for the general fostering of American literature, and has so steadily displayed upon its bead-roll, even to the present day, the names of the best of our native writers — was, as everybody knows, started by the late Francis H. Underwood, with the material backing of the publishers, Phillips, Sampson & Co. It was the founder's ambition to give *belles-lettres* an hospitable harbour, with the serious under-purpose of furnishing an “organ of expression for the great moral question” — slavery. To this end Mr. Underwood summoned the best writers of the day to his aid — Emerson, Mrs. Stowe, Lowell, Parker, Longfellow, Holmes, Prescott, Motley, and sent a cordial invitation to Whittier to contribute to the monthly. Holmes gave the magazine a name. Lowell was made its editor-in-chief. Monthly dinners to the contributors were for a time given, not always with the intended so-

cial hilarity, if one may judge from the description by Colonel Higginson of one of them, at which Mrs. Stowe, a stern water-drinker, was present, to the discomfiture of sundry authors who liked their glass of wine.

The success of the *Atlantic*, pronounced and permanent, is part of the history of American literature. Mr. Underwood and his associates achieved the difficult feat of making reform fashionable by giving it a coating of aesthetics. Whittier responded cordially, pledging his pen. "The Gift of Tritemius" appeared in the first number of the magazine. "Skipper Ireson's Ride," "Telling the Bees," and other poems of like quality were to find a place there. In fact, most of his finest work for the next ten years went into the *Atlantic*. This connection meant a great deal to him on the material side, for the magazine paid its contributors liberally, for that day; and this was a consideration with the

Quaker poet, who was not released from the money pinch familiar to him from youth until the pronounced success of *Snow-Bound* in 1866. On the social side, too, his *Atlantic* experiences must have been pleasant, bringing him into touch with other writers of importance, although, true to his lifelong habit of dodging convivial meetings, he was somewhat chary of attendance upon the far-famed dinners of the Saturday Club. But Whittier would not have been human, had he not relished the sun of favour which was beginning to smile blandly on him, after such long-continued storm. With the single exception of Lowell, no other author had so identified himself with an unpopular cause as had he ; and in Lowell's case there had been no real loss of social position, whereas with Whittier ostracism is hardly too strong a word to express his treatment for years by those whose good will he would naturally crave.

It was his custom to send his poems and to receive proofs thereof by mail. The coat of Quaker cut, the brilliant dark eye and erect, slight figure, the serene gravity of the man, were seen but seldom in editorial quarters or Beacon Street drawing-rooms. Whittier was reserved and shy in general company, a tendency increased by the deafness that afflicted him in later years. It must not be forgotten, on the other hand, that, although seeming to be incommunicative, he was, when at ease with friends, delightfully genial, a believer in the classic doctrine that it is wise to fool in season. His laugh was infectiously hearty, and with it went a habit of slapping his knee with his hand, which bespoke a soul of mirth.

This year of the *Atlantic's* initiation brought Whittier a sore sorrow. His mother died in January at the Amesbury home. The blow was heavy. "Half the motive power of life is lost,"

he wrote to Sumner the day after. But he was too well poised to let the loss interfere with duty. In the same letter he discusses the political situation; and the next month he was sending to the *Atlantic* a poem now regarded as one of our minor classics, "Telling the Bees." It is worth noting that his literary output at this time of grief was large and of a very high quality. Stirring events indeed were not wanting to draw him out of himself to think of the public welfare. In the autumn of 1859 occurred John Brown's attempt at Harper's Ferry. Whittier found himself between the devil and the deep sea with regard to this famous episode. As a lover of liberty, he could but sympathise with Brown. As a Quaker, a man of peace, he disapproved of violence. Moreover, the lack of judgment displayed in the attempt to arouse and arm the slaves offended a man whose practical good sense was always

conspicuous. His expressed opinion was that the rash raid "injured the cause" Brown "sought to serve." In his attitude towards war, as we have seen, Whittier was consistent with his Quaker affiliations. He felt that the lever proper to be used by the Friends was moral suasion, not force. He deplored the bloodshed of the civil conflict, when it came; but he was at pains to find its justification in the great principle at stake. He once remarked on the strangeness of his life in that he, a man of peace, should have been forced by circumstances into belligerency. But his whole life, whether in the stormy days that led up to the struggle or in the calm golden autumn that came to him after the settlement of the rights of man, was an illustration of the divine principle of love—love of God and man. God to him stood pre-eminently for that trait. He hated evil rather than men who in their blindness prac-

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tised it. On his death-bed, one of his utterances often repeated was the sentence, "Love—love to all the world."

Happenings outside his own country also roused his deep interest and sympathy. There was nothing parochial about his altruism. The European uprisings of 1848 had called forth some of his most ringing verse. Especially did he sympathise with the gallant struggle for liberty in Italy, as "*From Perugia*" testifies. A democrat in the broadest sense, the attempts to overthrow tyranny, to assert the inalienable rights of man in whatever land, were ever like trumpet-calls to his spirit, which, gentle as it was, became sternly martial at the summons. His poetry plainly reflects this feeling, many of its themes being inspired by foreign events. Yet again and again he got away from the inevitable strain upon his feelings in dealing with such motives, and sang some tender reminiscence of his homely boyhood,

like "My Playmate," or told in flowing stanzas some old-time story of New England folk-lore or legend of the country-side—"Cobbler Keezar," perhaps, or "The Witch's Daughter." But his interest in politics was vital; and he worked as hard as ever before in the Presidential campaign of 1860, and threw up his hat at the election of Lincoln with the gladness of a lad out of school,—the kind of lad described in his own "Barefoot Boy." Whittier was at this time in frequent correspondence with Sumner, applauding that statesman's stalwart stand for the right. They discussed ways and means together by letter or in the Garden Room at Amesbury, whither Sumner was glad to come, that he might draw on the wisdom of his Quaker friend and fellow-worker against slavery. Poems like "The Summons" and the sonnet to Seward are reflexes of this mood. Once in a way his indignation flames out at

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some instance of timid time-serving: clergymen, those natural conservatives, were a thorn in the flesh to Whittier, for the most part, in their position towards slavery. Of a certain book written by a divine to defend the Fugitive Slave Law, he wrote, "It is a curiosity of devilish theology worth studying." Whittier had little use for hair-splitting dogma. He once said in a letter, "We can do without Bible or church: we cannot do without God." The danger in religion of not seeing the forest for the trees he always escaped, both in spirit and in practice.

V.

WITH war on the land, Whittier, it may be believed, was not less active in the cause. His verse was, as before, a kind of rallying cry to the North. While it is true that the poetry he made at this time is not, as a rule, bellicose, it is also true that hardly any of the deliverances which appeared in the *Atlantic*, the *Independent*, and other publications during 1861-65, are without the militant spirit, showing either in subject and atmosphere throughout the poem or, if the theme were quieter, in lines and allusions by the way. There is no one lyric, to be sure, like Mrs. Howe's ringing "Battle Hymn of the Republic"; but there are songs and ballads in good number which are the honest and instant outcome of the mighty internecine struggle. It is customary to complain that our American poetry has responded but feebly to the war motive.

Possibly this is a tradition not quite in accord with the facts. Be this as it may, one does not feel the lack in reading the verse made by John Greenleaf Whittier during these red years. Mr. Underwood, in his study of Whittier, hazards the opinion that no great cause ever evoked more eloquent and effective literary outcry than that of anti-slavery.

With his usual political perspicacity, the poet saw that the central issue involved in the war was the disposition of the slave; that, in his own words, "there can be no union with slavery, that we must be 'first pure' before we can be 'peaceable' men." His characteristic optimism saw ultimate peace smile sunlike through the battle-smoke. His faith in the workings of God's providence remained firm. He was opposed to fighting from the first—against coercion of the South, as more than one private letter shows, as well as poems like "A Word for the Hour."

His constant interest in down-trodden men of whatever clime or color brought him, cut off from travel as he was, into relations with the select of the earth, however scattered. His English friend and fellow-Quaker, John Bright, may serve to point the remark. To him Whittier sent a sum of money for the relief of the English labourers who had suffered through the cutting off of the cotton supply. The poet, by the way, exercised his discretion as to his charities, and sometimes disappointed an Amesbury petitioner in consideration of a need further away, but more appealing to his convictions—a choice not always understood in his town. His relations with the noble emperor of Brazil, Dom Pedro, whose admiration for Whittier led him to translate “*The Cry of a Lost Soul*” into Portuguese, were peculiarly cordial. In after years that sovereign made a personal pilgrimage to the poet’s home. In Mr. Pickard’s

biography there is described a scene than which none more dramatic was ever enacted in the little Amesbury parlour. In 1863 Jessie Frémont, wife of the soldier-statesman in command of the department of the West, to whom Whittier's whole heart had gone forth in General Frémont's superb stand for freedom, came to tell the poet of her husband. He had been relieved of his Missouri command by Lincoln because of his proclamation freeing escaped slaves within his lines. He had been defeated at the polls. But, the wife declared, the fine poem Whittier had addressed to him, with its memorable opening lines,—

“Thy error, Frémont, simply was to act
A brave man’s part, without the states-
man’s tact,”

had uplifted him wonderfully in spirit, and come as a justification of his course. When the poet learned his guest’s name,

which Mrs. Frémont, with a sense of artistic climax, suppressed until the end of her narration, he spoke no word, but (the words are Mrs. Frémont's) "swung out of the room, to return infolding in his helping embrace a frail little woman, tenderly saying to the invalid he was bringing from her seclusion: 'Elizabeth, this is Jessie Frémont — under our roof. Our mother would have been glad to see this day.'" One feels that this is an essential revelation of the man. It is worth hours of perfunctory talk about his personal habits.

The group of poems, *In War Time*, are at once Whittier's contribution to the civil conflict and his spiritual autobiography in relation to it. They count up only a baker's dozen; but, from the solemn resignation that sounds in "Thy Will be done" to the warm, homely, human note of "Barbara Frietchie," they are his heart history during the most crucial four years of our national

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existence. The time is writ large in them. Whittier could not only write hymns, but war hymns, as his words to Luther's "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" testify—a vibrant utterance read in the cabinet of the President, and sung by the Hutchinsons on the battlefields of defeat or victory.

Before the end came, and with it that triumph of the slave which terminated, as one might say, Whittier's fighting years, another sore private sorrow was his. In 1864, after long years of suffering patiently borne, Elizabeth died, nearest and dearest of his close of kin, last of "the household hearts that were his own." The loss of this treasured sister, whose own verse was of lovely quality, upon whose literary advice and sympathy the brother had so long leaned, was an unspeakable affliction. Yet out of so rich a spiritual experience issued sweet song for the good of mankind. The exquisite lyric, "The Vanishers,"

the first poem to be composed after her death—"How strange it seems not to read it to my sister!" is his pathetic comment to Fields in sending it to the *Atlantic*—has a touch, a quality, that unmistakably suggest the lost companion. It was because of his sister that Lucy Larcom, her dearest friend, became so closely associated with him in friendship for the remainder of their lives. His niece, Mrs. S. T. Pickard, bearing the name of his beloved Lizzie, was to minister to him in years to come. And, as he walked the downward slope of life, his friends, as Mrs. Fields has expressed it, "became all in all to him. They were his mother, his sister, and his brother."

But the next year he, along with thousands of anxious, weary, bereaved men and women of the North, was to be cheered by the surrender of Lee and—what he really cared for—the passage of the Constitutional amendment abolish-

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ing slavery. His "Laus Deo," whose refrain rang in his ears as he sat at Fifth Day meeting, spoke his soul's rejoicing. "I am thankful for what I have lived to see and hear," he wrote to Fields. It was a personal triumph, such as is only vouchsafed to the few devoted reformers who weathered the storm. It was victory after thirty years of buffeting and of baffling opposition.

When peace was declared, he was too wise a lover of his country not to realise the importance of the reconstruction period, and the heavy problems which were the inevitable sequence of such a cataclysm. We find him in June, 1865, acting as one of the vice-presidents at a Faneuil Hall meeting in Boston, and the member of a committee to prepare an address to the people of the United States. His interest in all efforts looking to the proper recognition of the republicanism of the several States and their paramount duty to the common

fatherland was as warm and helpful as ever. But, as national affairs began to emerge into some order from the chaos of war times, Whittier's natural instinct for personal peace reasserted itself. He was glad to walk the quieter ways of literature. Comparing the years that had led up to the war with the generous allotment of life still to be his, it may be said that the dramatic part of his days was ended. Hereafter his stage was to be set for pastoral effects, his life to be little more than a record of his friendships and of his successive books of poetry. The long fight was over. Garrison could print in the *Liberator* the words of the official proclamation of the Constitutional amendment, and then publish the paper no more. Whittier's verse was freed from that immediate pressure of external events and circumstances which, in the long run, is not a good thing for art. Over a third of the poems he wrote before and up to the

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end of the war were on the theme of slavery. Now the reformer gave way to the singer. It must have been with a deep sigh of content, a healing sense of duty done, that he was able to turn his thought to work of a very different sort—to a homely idyl like *Snow-Bound*, to charming narratives such as are imbedded in *The Tent on the Beach*, to realistic yet idealised tales of New England rural life, of which *Among the Hills* is a type.

The five years following on the close of the war make up a period very important in the survey of Whittier's literary production—hardly equalled, indeed, by any other lustrum of his life. That this should be true of a poet in the late fifties and early sixties of his years is remarkable, is in a way an indication of the nature of his song. Whittier's poetry is not the Byronic expression of *Weltschmerz*, nor the registration of the storm and stress of youth.

Verse of that quality is commonly made before full maturity. The prime merits of the Quaker verse lie in the appeal to the homely and heartful in the life of the ordinary people, in his gentle, lovely description, and in the sweet communion of the spirit with the God who gave it. For this sort of verse—old-fashioned, be it granted, but, if not the greatest, a very acceptable sort in this stressful, sin-worn world of ours—there is no reason why the later years of a life (whose strength was as the strength of ten, because the heart was pure) should not be the best years for literature.

Snow-Bound, which was printed a year after the close of the war, and written during the summer following the downfall of the Confederacy, is expressive of his essential qualities. The position usually awarded it as his master-work rests on solid ground. Whittier was a New Englander in blood and bone. *Snow-Bound* is a representative poem of

New England, describing in a series of etched scenes the typical life of a country household—in a setting of external nature that is deliciously recognisable to any son of New England. The poem is also intensely autobiographical. It commemorates the family group that was wont to gather before the big fire-place in the old kitchen of the Haverhill farm-house; and the members of that circle are seen through the pensive half-light of memory, touched with the glamour of the years, yet the more distinctly drawn (there is a Dutch-like fidelity of drawing) because in place of photography the idealism of art produces veritable portraiture. It is all so clearly, so lovingly visualised and felt. Whittier, when this winter idyl was completed, instinctively realised that it was, in the nobler meaning of the word, realistic—a feeling that is behind his remark to Fields, his publisher: “Don’t put the poem on tinted or fancy

paper. Let it be white as the snow it tells of." The homeliness of the subject-matter is matched by the homeliness of the metre in which it is written. It was a happy instinct that led the poet to throw the poem into the four-foot rhyming couplet, since Chaucer's day an honoured vehicle in English poetry for the purposes of plain, objective narrative. It is the relish of reality felt through a time-mist of affection which gives savour to *Snow-Bound*. Its charm is that of a homely *genre* piece by a Low Country painter. Perhaps such poetry does not thrill one with a passionate sense of beauty, but it has a household virtue.

The success of the poem, hearty and instant, was a prognosis of its future place among his productions. Materially, it meant more money than Whittier had ever dreamed he would earn by literary labour. The first impression of *Snow-Bound* netted him ten thousand dollars, and his surprise has

in it a touch of pathos. It suggests the uncertain conditions by which one in the first half of the century prosecuted the profession of letters, that a poet of national standing, at well-nigh sixty, is still unfamiliar with the thought that his literary wares have a decided market value. Whittier awoke to a realisation of this late in life. Henceforth the *res angusta domi* was to harass him no more; but, alas! the mother and sister, to the increase of whose comforts he would have so dearly liked to devote his larger means, were beyond his care. *Snow-Bound* was a memorial of them. Though dedicated to the whole "household," it is safe to say that these two were the patron saints of this offering upon the altar of home. There is the same pensive thought associated with this great material and artistic success of Whittier's that one feels in the case of Robert Browning, who in late middle life achieved solid reputation with *The*

Ring and the Book, when she of the "Portuguese Sonnets," whose praise and appreciation would have meant most of all, had passed beyond the little triumphs of Time.

In *The Tent on the Beach*, which followed the next year, the poet grouped a number of his ballads, mostly on popular themes of New England folk-lore and tradition, the pleasant bond of connection being his friends Fields and Bayard Taylor. Taylor he loved and admired, perhaps, in part, for the very reason that the intrepid traveller, the accomplished diplomat and littérateur, possessed qualities which Whittier lacked. It was the attraction of opposites. There was, too, the natural tie of their common Quaker parentage. Whittier used to say jokingly that he did his travelling by proxy, in the person of his fellow-poet. With Fields the relation of author and publisher had supplied, as we have seen, the basis for one of the hold-fast

friendships of Whittier's life. The interchange of letters between Mrs. Fields and the poet in his final years shows him in some of his loveliest and most revelatory moods. Fields and Taylor, then, pitch their tent with Whittier on Salisbury beach, "where sea-winds blow," and, Arabian Nights' fashion, they beguile the time with tales. The idea is a happy one; and the picturesque prelude contains as good description, as accurate portraiture, as may be found in the whole range of his work. The colloquial connecting links, too, furnish an agreeable lowland atmosphere in contrast with the higher air of the ballads themselves. It is this general agreeability rather than specific greatness in any one of the poems which characterises *The Tent on the Beach* as a whole. The poet did not feel altogether satisfied with it, declaring, indeed, that he would not have published the poem but for a premature announcement of its appear-

ance by Fields. Whittier's criticism of his own work was safer than was his judgment when he was dealing with that of others ; for his natural kindness and the bias of friendships led him sometimes into over-praise—a fault, if a fault at all, that leans to virtue's side.

Nobody, not even Lowell in *A Fable for Critics*, has ever surpassed Whittier's own delineation of himself, here to be found — the singer who

“Left the Muses' haunts to turn
The crank of an opinion-mill.”

The poet, we repeat, was always clear-sighted about himself. He was perfectly well aware of his tendency to didacticism as well as of his faults of technique. When an old man, we hear him whimsically complain that his friends who had been graduated from Harvard demanded that he, the graduate of the district school, should be as letter-perfect as they. Nor was he unsympathetic to the

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idea of "art for art's sake," as the phrase goes. In one of the ballads of this very collection he makes Taylor say,—

"But art no other sanction needs
Than beauty for its own fair sake,"

going on, however, to justify, by the mouth of another speaker, a moral purpose in literature. Those who would know Whittier's attitude towards letters, both as craft and mission, should also have in mind the proem to the first general edition of his poems, written in 1847, at the age of forty. In its artistic beauty and noble ethics it justifies his creed in a double sense.

The reception of the book was another notification, if one were needed, of his steady acceptability. The edition sold at the rate of a thousand copies a day; and again the poet, filled with a sense of his unworthiness, could only hold up astonished hands, and cry out to Fields,

half in jest, half in earnest, "The swindle is awful." Along with this financial easement went other signs of his having won a large place in the public estimation, academic honors among them. As far back as 1858 he had been elected a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers. Two years later the proud old Cambridge college gave him the Master's degree, as did the Quaker Haverford College in the same year ; and in 1866 the degree of Doctor of Laws came from Brown. But to a man like Whittier congenial work done in quiet and communion with his friends, and with the beautiful aspects of nature as a recreation from that work, made up his life, and was far more than any possible recognition. The note of depreciation so often heard from him in respect of his writings may be taken as the index of an honest feeling. There is no taint in it of the mock-humble. It expresses the genuine humility of a modest and can-

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did nature, and also his deep sense of the unreliability and littleness of human fame in the face of the august spiritual realities which were to Whittier, especially in his later years, the only great things. His common sense, too, rebelled at the silly adulation which the popular writer is destined to receive. Nevertheless, true appreciation was a joy to him ; and he often expressed his gratitude for the love and admiration he had awakened.

The pathetic background to this success is seen when one realises that at the time Whittier's health was wretched, so that, in refusing an invitation to visit his publisher, he declares, "I am a bundle of nerves for Pain to experiment upon" — a graphic summary of a life-long disability. Still, comparing the later years with the period of mid-manchood, it is comforting to reflect that Whittier was unquestionably less hampered on the whole by physical ills during his last twenty-five years.

The narrative *Among the Hills*, in which Whittier seized on a story he heard while spending a vacation among the New Hampshire lakes, and used for the purpose of crying up the good results of the union of town and country, has the appreciation of nature, the loving, closely observed descriptions of farm life, and the hearty spirit of democracy which make it characteristic. One notes that the prelude in blank verse (not found in the first draft of the poem) is sternly realistic, depicting the graver, less pleasant aspects of rural life. The melodious rhymed story that follows is then all the more enjoyable. Whittier's was too honest a nature to wink at facts, though his gentleness and trust led him to bear down prevailingly on the brighter side. The love-tale is well told ; and only the cynical will scoff at its wholesome teaching, made more familiar in "*Maud Muller.*" Certainly, it was not scoffed at by the contempo-

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rary public, which, on the contrary, welcomed the poem with eagerness. It headed the volume published the year after *The Tent on the Beach*; and the feeling of the publishers with regard to the demand for his verse is indicated by their bringing out the next year, 1869, a handsome illustrated edition of his *Ballads of New England*, among them that permanently appealing lyric, loved alike by Tennyson and the plain people, "In School-days," whose little heroine so many good folk have zealously, if not wisely, sought to name and localise, the poet meanwhile holding his peace. Nothing is more dangerous than to use a poet's idealisations as genuine entries in his diary. Even to-day there are hints of school-boy courtships lingering about the old Haverhill homestead, but just enough to sweeten the air — nothing to set down for fact.

By the publication of these successive volumes, Whittier stood forth as never

before as New England's bard, singer of her humble life past and present, seer of her homely ways of peace and labour as well as of the impassioned moment when she arose in her might and smote her enemy, hip and thigh. He was to live for a quarter-century. He was to write much verse, some of it of very high value. But he had shown his hand, both as man and maker of music. The people knew him and loved him. The remaining years could but intensify that sentiment, and bring him cumulatively the rewards of his noble life-work.

L. of C.

VI.

QUIET and secluded as was Whittier's life in the Amesbury home, its not unwelcome monotony was often broken by the coming of dear friends to him for brief sojourns by the winter hearth-fire, invariably tended by his own hand, or, when the summer days returned, under the garden trees. His correspondence shows how much he relished these visitings. The playful side of the poet disported itself most lovingly at such times. Occasionally, too, until the feebleness of age forbade, he would run down to Boston, and appear in the Fields's breakfast-room before the members of the household had left their sleeping-rooms. And it was his habit to seek recreation in other places during the warm months. For many years Whittier spent a portion, at least, of the vacation time in the lake region of south-east New Hampshire, a country

he knew and loved as well as he did his own Merrimac valley. In truth, it might fairly be called Whittier-land, so intimate and many are the associations with the poet. New Hampshire rivalled Massachusetts in his poetry. A score of poems commemorate these surroundings. *Among the Hills* is one of them. He seemed to prefer the quiet, pastoral beauty of the south-lying section to the more rugged scenery of the White Mountains proper. He liked to be near the sea ; for though, as a native of Haverhill, he might be called inland-bred, yet his home was well-nigh within the sound of the ocean's voice. Whittier remarks in a letter to Celia Thaxter that he could all but see and hear her in her island haunt on the Isles of Shoals. Mrs. Thaxter could see Po Hill on clear days from her house on the sea-girt rock. At the Bearcamp House in West Ossipee, at Centre Harbor, at Holderness, Asquam Lake, Conway, Wakefield, or

Greenacre, many delightful days were spent in the company of kindred spirits. After the centennial year, moreover, at which time occurred the marriage of his niece Lizzie, now Mrs. Pickard, who had kept house for him in Amesbury and who removed to Portland, he passed a part of each twelvemonth for the rest of his life at the charming countryplace of relatives in Danvers, named Oak Knoll by the poet because of a clump of noble oaks on a mossy swell in front of the house. There, but an hour distant from Amesbury, with his own writing quarters, in luxurious seclusion, surrounded by comforts within and the appealing loveliness of nature without, and carefully protected from the interruptions which come to a famous man, and in his case sometimes went near to converting the mild Quaker into a Boanerges, Whittier knew much happiness. But his home feeling naturally centred on Amesbury, his residence for nearly

forty years, sacredly associated with his mother and sister. In this regard it came before the Haverhill homestead in his affection. Late in his life he had an opportunity to purchase the Haverhill place at a low figure, but on reflection decided not to secure it.

Along with the giving over of the strenuous struggle in behalf of the slave had gone a release from the editorial grind which had long cabined and confined him from work more strictly literary. That Whittier appreciated being able in his later life to devote his writing powers to what may be called literature need not be doubted. Nevertheless, he did not regret his journalistic training and experience.

In a letter to Mr. E. L. Godkin he repudiates what the editor of the *Nation* took to be a slighting reference to newspaper work in *The Tent on the Beach*, and declares that he considered his editorial labour in the cause of liberty his main

life-work, his work as an author being "simply episodical," and the public favour gained thereby "a grateful surprise rather than an expected reward." Whittier, in fact, stepped into literature by the despised back door of journalism, as American men of letters have been in the way of doing from the earliest day to our own. The newspaper has proved a foster-mother, not a step-mother, to literary aspirants.

Robert Louis Stevenson's pathetic wish (in the days when fortune had not yet smiled upon him) for three of the gifts of the gods to make existence glad will be remembered — a modest but assured income, health, and friends, especially friends. The first and last, at least, Whittier had in full measure for the rest of his days. Few men have been more richly blessed in friends, and this is in itself a sign of his power for winning and holding hearts. The unstable nature of health had its effect, as we

have seen, in excluding him from much in the way of social pleasure. It produced at first an impression of shyness in his character, which in time became, in some measure, a genuine characteristic. But one recompense came to him and his intimates in the peculiarly close and cordial relations between them. Perhaps one physically capable of steady mental labour might have seen less of and been less to others. As it is, Whittier's productiveness in prose and verse, of which a sense is borne in upon one who glances through the full list of his works to be found in Foley's *American Authors*, is doubly remarkable because of this handicap. A certain tenderness must have been felt by those entering into warm personal intercourse with him because of his physical infirmities. Besides the organic heart trouble and the growing deafness in one ear, another, although slight, physical defect may be here alluded to. He was colour-blind in respect of red

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and green. The red apple was not distinguishable in hue from the green leaves surrounding it — a thing hard to realise in a writer whose verse is so picturesquely rich in colour values. But, after all, in reviewing the calm, benign, and prosperous late years of Whittier, the feeling is that his lot was a most fortunate one. The ancient saying, “Call no man happy until he is dead,” does not apply to him. By his own word, he enjoyed life, despite all its tragedies, bitternesses, and losses, to the end.

The production of poetry during the years between the sixtieth and seventieth of his life was steady and of a high average quality, comparing favourably with what had gone before. There was no second *Snow-Bound*, it is true; but narrative poems like “*Miriam*” and “*The Pennsylvania Pilgrim*,” lyrics so good as “*The Pageant*,” or a memorial such as the stately ode to Sumner — whose death he mourned as the loss of

a dear friend and admired leader—show no hint of the coming of the night when no man can work. In these mature efforts, Whittier gave far more attention to self-criticism than of old. His verse bears marks of the labour of the file, to its advantage. The art value of his work is unquestionably greater. And he kept, to a marvellous degree into extreme old age the lyric gift, the capacity for tuneful song: he lay down with his singing-robes wrapt about him. In all strictures on his technique, it will be well to bear this in mind. Tennyson alone, among the poets of our time and tongue, equalled Whittier in this respect—Tennyson, with his “Crossing the Bar,” a precious distillation, when he had attained to fourscore years.

The volume called *Child Life: A Collection of Poems*, which he compiled in 1871, and which was followed two years later by its companion, *Child Life in Prose*, is of interest in its suggestion of

Whittier's deep and abiding love for the young — evidence of which his letters contain in abundance. Here was one of the most winsome phases of his nature. In his summer wanderings children followed him about as they did (for another reason) the Pied Piper. The grave, dignified, unbending Quaker — (a friend has noted his peculiar physical perpendicularity, so marked that, in picking up an object from the floor, he did not bend his back like common mortals) — had the child-heart which the little ones recognised and loved. A large and beautiful side of the poet's character comes out in his relations, not to children alone, but to his humble neighbours and — no less significant — to animal friends, who were always to be found as household pets in his different homes from the day when he affectionately rubbed the nose of his father's cow in the barn at Haverhill. With the rank and file of his fellow-townsmen in Haverhill or

Amesbury he was on terms of easy friendship that held no hint of superiority or aloofness. He would "sit on a barrel, and discuss the affairs of the day," with them, Colonel Higginson tells us. As a converse to this, those uncrowned kings, his neighbours, were free, after the true American fashion, to vent opinions of him as of any other citizen, and exercised their rights. There was some expression of grieved surprise when at the poet's death he was found possessed of the substantial little fortune of one hundred and forty thousand dollars. It was a trifle like stealing a march on the town. Whittier, for his part, carried the democratic feeling of fellowship so far as to fall when in conversation with plain folk into the grammar-defying colloquialisms of the locality, as when he astonished a labourer much in awe of the bard, with whom he was discoursing of apples, by declaring, "Some years they ain't wuth pickin'."

Whittier's Quakerism, always a central and controlling influence in his work as well as life, was sweetened and broadened as he grew older. He was a faithful attendant upon the meetings of the Friends. His coat, of a model he gave a tailor in Philadelphia when he was in his thirties, remained Quaker-cut to the last. He loved the simpler methods of the sect, and had small sympathy with the attempts to introduce new-fangled modifications of the old ways of gravity and silence. Neither steeples without nor show singing within pleased his taste. His disbelief in war underlay the most perfervid of his diatribes against slavery. In fact, this phase of his utterance was an expression of his Quaker creed, since one of its cardinal expressions is love of personal freedom—an outward manifestation to balance its esoteric leaning on the doctrine of the Inner Light. Yet in 1875, when he was compiling *Songs of Three*

Centuries with Lucy Larcom, he overruled his feeling as to warlike poems so far as to include Mrs. Howe's "Battle Hymn of the Republic." And many a passage in his correspondence testifies that in these elder years his religion was in no vital sense sectarian—a fact further and happily illustrated by the use of numerous hymns from his hand among the various denominations. The best of his religious verse is as catholic, as uncircumscribed by dogma, as one of Richard Jefferies's hill-top adorations. Whittier's religion, indeed, was of the heart rather than of the head. The calm beauty of holiness is the note of his ripe maturity. "I think every child should cling to the faith of its parents until it learns something better," he declared. He did not escape the inevitable readjustments of religious views in the light of scientific revelations, culminating about 1850 in Darwin, Wallace, and Spencer, and since so won-

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derfully expanded. His mind was too candid and too open, his soul too unflinchingly honest, for any other result. His poems of the later years are witnesses. Read "My Soul and I" and "Questions of Doubt" to realise it. Doubt he knew, but with him trust and love conquered. At times the great mysteries weighed heavily upon his spirit. The attitude in some of his finest spiritual songs suggests that of Tennyson in *In Memoriam* — the brooding, analytic intellect giving way to the intuitive affirmations.

The instinctive looking to Whittier as a national poet was exemplified by the request of Gilmore that he write an ode for the Peace Jubilee of 1873, — a request refused, though afterwards Whittier sent in anonymously the poem printed in his works as "A Christmas Carmen," and certainly far ahead of most verse of occasion. There is some amusement in the reflection that Gilmore rejected the

ode, unaware of its authorship. One regrets that the musician was not a magazine editor or publisher, that one might indulge in satire on the familiar mistakes of those maligned judges. Whittier could never depend upon himself to accept engagements of this kind. He did not possess the facility of his friend, Dr. Holmes, in this sort of accomplishment; but his efforts at such times, when once the "yes" was said, were always of a certain dignity, an elevation, and sincerity which made them satisfactory. Another example of the "occasional" was the "Centennial Hymn" for the national celebration of 1876, written at the earnest request of Bayard Taylor, who had composed a hymn himself, and afterwards withdrawn it because he had accepted an invitation to write an ode for the same festival. Whittier's memorial poem, "The Vow of Washington," for the centennial of the inauguration of the first President

of the republic, is still another composition of this class ; and, although the poet declared himself ashamed of it, the critic to-day, remembering that it was produced at eighty-two, must pronounce it to be a remarkable example of the retention of poetic powers. The manner of its reception by the people at large, moreover, was of a kind to remove doubt even from its author's mind.

Whittier's seventieth birthday, in 1877, was marked by commemorative happenings, and stands out a white milestone in his peaceful life journey. The Boston *Literary World* for December 1 of that year published many tributes in verse and prose by representative American men and women of letters. There were letters from veterans like Mrs. Stowe, Bancroft, and Bryant ; poems from fellow-songmen—Longfellow, Holmes, Taylor, and Mr. Stedman—to pick out a few. There followed on the night of his birthday, the 17th, a dinner

at the Hotel Brunswick in Boston, given by the publishers of the *Atlantic Monthly*, then celebrating its own twentieth birthday, to contributors to that magazine, with Mr. H. O. Houghton presiding and Whittier the guest of honour. The gathering of literary folk was noteworthy; and Whittier, who had attended the unwonted (perhaps not altogether welcome) function with much secret misgiving—"It is bad enough to be old, without being twitted with it," he humorously complained to a member of his family—even felt it incumbent upon him to make a little speech, by way of introducing a poem written for the occasion, and thereupon read by Longfellow. Speech-making was a social exercise entirely laid aside by Whittier since the days of his political activity. Dr. Holmes read a characteristically felicitous piece of verse, in which occurred the oft-quoted epithet descriptive of his friend as the "wood-

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thrush of Essex." The exercises included a burlesque treatment of the three leaders—Longfellow, Holmes, and Whittier—by Mark Twain, whose instinct for audacious fun-making was not to be quelled by that august assembly. When the Quaker singer was introduced, the whole company arose and cheered. The anniversary was also commemorated in various towns, led by Amesbury and Danvers. From this time, as the years went on, the celebrations of his birthdays in the schools and other educational institutions of our land became annual, as his fame became more and more a household word. This recognition, democratic, spontaneous, and general, was, especially in view of the partisan nature of his early writings, as welcome as it was exceptional. But Whittier preserved his ingrain modesty. "Over-praise pains like blame," he wrote to Mr. Houghton. His conscience was of the familiar Puritan type which did not

allow undue self-complacency. Moreover, he was now an old man, to whom, as he said, the "eternal realities" were "taking the place of the shadows and illusions of time." It is a satisfaction to behold a good and gifted man reaping the fruits of a noble mid-day labour in a beautiful Indian summer of rest and peace. The annals of literature do not present too many such spectacles. It is one of the admirable things about our elder and major American writers that their lives and works are so frequently in this harmony; and in no case, surely, is it truer than in Whittier's.

There was much fine song in him still. Fifteen years of life and production were ahead of the frail New Englander, who in early manhood had, in the opinion of his Haverhill acquaintances, taken to writing as a second best thing, when the state of his health precluded business or active politics. Only the next year (1878) *The*

Vision of Echard, and Other Poems, included some of the loveliest of his lyrics—"The Witch of Wenham," which made Dr. Holmes cry; the charming descriptive piece, "Sunset on the Bear-camp"; and the delicately chivalric "The Henchman," one of the very few love-poems ever written by Whittier, and suggesting that he could have won laurels in a field he rarely entered. That a bard who was rising seventy could turn out such verse is unusual enough to put a value upon it over and above its intrinsic merit, which is very genuine.

VII.

WHITTIER'S old age, peaceful and fortunate as it was, could not escape one of the stern penalties of longevity—the loss of friends. They dropped off one by one—the comrades of abolition days or those with whom he since had come into close communion. Year by year Holmes's thought of the “last leaf upon the tree” could come more closely, keenly, home to the poet. Sumner died in 1872, Bayard Taylor in 1878, Longfellow in 1882, and others, of less note, but not less warmly loved, departed in their turn. His correspondence became increasingly a burden, as it must to any man of wide reputation, augmented in his case by an old-fashioned dislike to dictation, which led him to reply to letters by his own hand, and because of his kindly heart, which made him shrink from the refusal of solicitations of all kinds. The autograph fiend was

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abroad, and the literary pilgrim ever at his gates. But there were many mitigations. New friends were raised up for him as the older ones passed away : many of the latter still remained. Whittier's correspondence, particularly with the younger writers, men and women in whom he took a keen interest and whose work he cordially appreciated, was one of his chief pleasures. Helping to a realisation of this fact are the letters exchanged with Lucy Larcom, Celia Thaxter, Miss Sarah Orne Jewett, Mrs. Elizabeth Stuart Phelps Ward, Gail Hamilton, Mrs. Charlotte Fiske Bates, Miss Edna Dean Proctor—veterans and comparative beginners—all united in loving veneration of his personality. Dr. Holmes, who outlived him to write his epitaph, was a treasured neighbour, and would drive over from Beverly to Danvers now and again for a quiet talk. Nor did the poet drop his hold on affairs. In these years of re-

tirement his letters show how closely he followed public events. Now he comments on Hayes's inaugural address; now writes a letter to the Boston *Advertiser*, protesting against the movement to defeat the re-election of Senator Hoar, of Massachusetts; now he is sending Mr. Winslow a contribution to the Egyptian Exploration Fund, with a note revealing his sympathetic knowledge of that work. He watched the drift of politics with a scarcely abated attention, and with the old-time loyalty to a party which, whatever its mistakes, stood, he believed, for great principles. "I am a Republican still," he wrote at the time when the voice of the Mugwump was heard in the land. "If my party makes a bad nomination, I shall not vote for it, but shall not stultify myself by going over to a party which has done its worst to destroy the Union and sustain slavery"—a remark having the ring of the militant days.

But the things of God were most to him in these later years. "He dwelt most intently," writes a friend, "upon the great spiritual and eternal realities." He loved more and more the quiet memories gathering about the Amesbury cottage, upon whose walls the portraits of mother and sister were silent but eloquent witnesses to the unforgotten past. None the less did he enjoy the frequent changes of residence already described — the roomy seclusion of Oak Knoll, the visits with his kin, the Cartlands, at Newburyport. The circumference of the circle describing these travellings only gradually narrowed as feebleness grew upon him.

Meanwhile he continued to write; and successive volumes of his verse were published. Between 1880 and 1892, the year of his death, he printed nearly ninety poems, in one year (1882) writing a dozen, and eight so late as in the year 1890. In 1880 he wrote, "I am

old enough to be done with work, only I feel that my best words have not been said, after all." Lovers of Whittier's poetry could ill have spared such a final volume as that entitled *At Sundown*, which appeared for public reading (it was first privately circulated) the year before his death, and contained, among other things, those benignly beautiful lyrics, "Burning Driftwood," "The Wind of March," and "The Last Eve of Summer," together with the tender, tranquilly reverential tribute to Holmes, literally Whittier's swan song, and lovely enough to fit the legend.

Whittier was spared the death in life of a long illness. In the early summer of 1892 he had gone to Hampton Falls, New Hampshire, but a few miles from Amesbury, to spend some weeks in the company of chosen spirits, making his home with Miss Sarah A. Gore, the daughter of an old and dear friend memorialised in the poem "A Friend's

Burial." It was his intention to go on later to Centre Harbor, one of his accustomed haunts. He had suffered from an attack of grippe the preceding winter, and in this environment improved fast and found refreshment and pleasure. "I have not known such a rest for forty years," he said. "Not one pilgrim for three weeks" — the designation of the vulgar curiosity-monger as "pilgrim" being a euphuism which suggests the man's kindly, gentle nature. Here, in the heat of mid-August, he wrote letters, attended morning Bible readings, composed the poem to Holmes for *At Sundown*, and read the proofs of that volume. Old associations made the place dear to him. Sitting beneath the trees one day, he cried: "This is a very sweet spot to me. I used to come here with my mother!" From a second-story balcony, where he often sat, he could look across the wide meadows, and see the ships adventure upon the wider ocean. So peace-

ful and happy was this sojourn that, when the Centre Harbor plan was broached, he decided to remain where he was. And then he was seized by one of the attacks not unusual to him in the hot season, and at first not deemed serious. But on September 3 a slight paralytic shock was the beginning of the end ; and, after five days of comparatively painless ebbing away of strength, he was at peace, and the bells of Haverhill and Amesbury were tolling the eighty-four years of his age. On September 10 the funeral took place at Amesbury, "in the plain and quiet way of the Society of Friends," as Whittier had requested. The body lay in the little parlour ; but the services, with exquisite fitness, were held in the garden he had carefully cherished and loved, into whose trees and flowers he had looked for many years from his writing-room. The day was one of autumn's benedictions. Mr. Stedman and others spoke ; and the

Hutchinsons lifted their worn sweet voices in song. In its simplicity and absence of all the conventions that make death twice gloomy, the scene was in delicate consonance with the man who was mourned—the poet of nature and of humanity.

In the section of the picturesque Amesbury burying-ground set apart for the Friends Whittier was laid beside his kin—they were seven when he joined them: father and mother, uncle and aunt, brother and sisters—the broken circle of *Snow-Bound* now reunited for the long sleep. Simple stones mark their high resting-place, which looks down from its vantage-point upon the valley town, and is near the Merrimac as its waters hasten to meet the sea. Close to his birthplace, among the fair things of sky, hill, and field upon which his hand has set a second seal of loveliness, he takes his rest, and has left the world

“A blameless record shrined in deathless song.”

Both the Haverhill and Amesbury houses, touchingly interesting memorials to all who love Whittier, are now open to the public, and are preserved as nearly as may be with all the personal effects which make them shrines of the poet. The late James Carlton, of Haverhill, left a sum of money which is applied to this high purpose. At Amesbury a company of women, known as the Whittier Home Association, has rented the cottage from Mrs. Pickard, the poet's niece, with the hope of purchasing it in time. There are custodians in both houses, which in these days of the trolley are easily accessible. No more charming summer-day pilgrimage can be imagined.

Whittier's place in the native song is not merely an historical thing. It is present and living. His laurels as a major bard were won and worn long

before he died. His contemporaneous influence was great. We are now far enough removed in time to look back upon his literary work with an analytic eye. There has been gain in literary art, in the knowledge and practice of the writing craft in the United States since Whittier's prime. It was easier to win fame then than it is now. His artistic aspects and limitations are apparent. His measures are as simple as his meanings are direct and clear. He does not give us nuts to crack, as does Browning. But there is danger in our critical estimates to-day of over-emphasis on art or so-called originality at the expense of life. Whittier's verse in its union of moral purpose with the sense of beauty — it might be said that the one rhyme of his poetry is that made by *beauty* and *duty* — points to the true source of vitality for all literature which is to survive its own day and to interest, please, and help large numbers of men and women.

Whittier's steady hold upon the masses and classes—go to the schools and libraries of the land to see how little it has changed—is thus to be explained. The critical award of a distinct place amongst our elder singers—quite as definite and worthy as that of Bryant, Emerson, and Longfellow, of Lowell and Holmes—is but the same testimony from another point of view. Rural New England, New England of the plain people, finds through John Greenleaf Whittier its most authentic expression in literature. The poet of a section—and what a section! as Mr. Stedman exclaims—becomes, for the very reason that he so honestly reflects his own environment, a representative and treasured national poet—the common paradox of literary history.

Yet, as one thinks of Whittier in the interpretative light of his life, what he was seems full as impressive as what he gave the world as a writer. The man

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looms up larger than his work. This is as he would have it. He was, aside from his great gifts, a good man, intensely lovable and much beloved. His life was sweet and true and high. Among his books in the Amesbury house is a quaint little copy of Thomas à Kempis, bound in faded leather, containing this marked passage: "Esteem not thyself better than others, lest perhaps thou be accounted worse in the sight of God, who knows what is in man"; and Whittier was a humble-minded and very true follower of the Christ-life. He once said, referring to posthumous reputation, "What we are will then be more important than what we have done or said in prose or rhyme." His natural gift for song, his sincere love for his fellow-men, and his wholesome reverence for righteousness are traits not to be distorted by changes of literary models nor blurred by the passing of time.

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